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ABSTRACT

On January 24, 1973, the city public school system of Memphis, Tennessee, began implementing the initial phase of a court-ordered desegregation, and 65 buses--the first ever used in Memphis--rolled through the city streets. What is the significance of the events of January 24 there? What are the implications for urban school systems elsewhere in the country? How did Memphis do what it did, and why did it do it? What has happened since then, and what is likely to happen next? This article attempts to answer these questions. It is felt by the author that it is too soon to investigate the educational side of school desegregation. (Author/SB)

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Promise of Progress

Memphis School Desegregation, 1972-1973

ED 081858

by John Egerton

Southern Regional Council / 52 Fairlie Street, N.W. / Atlanta, Ga. 30303
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Introduction

This report by John Egerton, a distinguished education reporter and Tennessee native, continues the Southern Regional Council's long-term interest in matters relating not only to school desegregation and education but to positive efforts by local leadership to meet and try to solve some of the most difficult administrative problems facing all cities in the South and the nation today.

In a very real sense the Memphis story is a success story, a success hammered out in tough and realistic sessions between opposing forces, a success brought about against a background of much turmoil, citizen misunderstanding, all in a city which only five years ago was almost prostrated by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., all in a city which too often in the past had seemed wedded to the past.

The Southern Regional Council believes that the Memphis story should, in a sense, serve as a model for other cities, both north and south, who now face or soon will face the same problems, maybe the same hysterias that brought Memphis to its moment of decision in January of this year. This is not to say that Memphis' problems are all solved. Only the naive would ever make such a presumption, particularly in the sometimes tenuous state of change and flux that seems to characterize developments in school desegregation and education in the '70's.

But Memphis has made some important decisions, moved beyond good intentions and good beginnings and now in the fall must hold fast to its resolve. We believe from the record set forth by Mr. Egerton here that the city has the potential, the strength and the determination to do so.

George Esser
Executive Director

Harry Bowie
Associate Director

In the courts, there had been litigation for more years than most people could remember—hearings, orders, appeals, charges, answers, counter-suits, modifications, delays. In the schools, there had been segregation, desegregation, resegregation, annexation, white flight, teacher reassignments, black boycotts, white boycotts. In the city, there had been organized resistance and organized support, threats of disruption and rumors of violence, feverish strategy sessions, intensive planning, meticulous preparation.

And finally, the end and the beginning came to Memphis, Tennessee: On January 24, 1973, that city's public school system began implementing the initial phase of a court-ordered desegregation plan, and 65 buses—the first ever used in Memphis—rolled through the city streets.

The dominant atmosphere was one of subdued anticlimax. Absenteeism was high, but nobody bothered the buses, or the kids, or the teachers. "Quiet Day As Busing Is Started," read a one-column headline in the afternoon *Memphis Press-Scimitar;* "Absences, Calm Mark Busing," said the next morning's *Commercial Appeal. The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* had reporters in town for a couple of days, and two of the television networks noted the event briefly on their evening news programs, and that was it. School desegregation without disruption and violence is no longer a hot news item. To say it happened "without incident" is to say it will not be reported on any more— unless more "incidents" occur.

Memphis had the 10th largest public school system in the United States, and a majority of its students are black. What is the significance of the events of January 24 there? What are the implications for urban school systems elsewhere in the country? How did Memphis do what it did, and why did it do it? What has happened since then, and what is likely to happen next? A visitor to the city early in March, five weeks after the start of busing, could find a multiplicity of conflicting and corroborating answers to those questions. From piles of newspaper clippings, from reams of reports and memos and documents and statistics and studies, and from the minds of dozens of participants and observers, the complex story of a city's halting search for equity and stability comes tumbling out. And among the dominant impressions and tentative conclusions to be drawn from it all are these: Memphis has started to bus children to school in the face of strong opposi-

tion, and has done it in a manner that is, on the whole, impressive. The city is deeply and seriously divided within itself on the issue of school integration. The hardest phase of desegregation by busing still remains to be faced. The job of making integration a success for individual students and teachers is just now beginning. And the city's search for equity and stability is still a long way from being finished.

Understanding the way things are now necessitates a perception of the way they used to be—years ago, months ago, and in the days before and after January 24. When the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) first filed a desegregation suit against the Memphis school system in March, 1960, there were just over 100,000 students in the schools—about 55 per cent of them white—and segregation was complete. In September, 1962, a handful of black first graders enrolled for the first time in previously all-white schools, and by 1967 there was some desegregation in all grades, though it was generally only token. In September, 1968, LDF sought further relief from the federal district court, pointing out that segregation was still the predominant pattern in the vast majority of schools. (Even as recently as September, 1972, about 130 of the city's 160-plus schools still were overwhelmingly of one race or the other, with some 68 being over 90 per cent black and about 62 being 90 to 100 per cent white.)

District Judge Robert M. McRae Jr., ordered desegregation of the faculties in May, 1969, but he held that *de jure* segregation of students had been ended, and the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati subsequently agreed with him. In March, 1970, the U. S. Supreme Court reversed the district and appeals judges and sent the case back to Judge McRae for further resolution. After some adjustments in the desegregation proposals, the case went up again to Cincinnati, and in May, 1971, the appeals court ruled that in light of the Supreme Court decision in Charlotte, North Carolina, Memphis would have to do more. A team of experts from the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) was ordered in to draw up a plan, but the team was later removed from involvement on orders from Washington, and the school board's staff had to finish the job.

In April, 1972, Judge McRae had before him several alternative plans that varied widely in the amount of desegregation and busing they called for. McRae chose the one that required the least amount of busing—some 13,000 elementary and junior high students—and ordered it implemented in September. That proposal was known as Plan A. A series of appeals and stay orders resulted in postponement of the implementation until January, 1973, but Plan A was eventually upheld by the Supreme Court, and in the months before it was put into effect, the people of Memphis came to their crucible with deeply divided minds.

As the Memphis school system has grown in the past decade, so has its percentage of black students. As the black enrollment grew, the city annexed portions of surrounding Shelby County and managed to retain a white

majority in the schools, but by the fall of 1970 the enrollment of more than 148,000 was slightly over 50 per cent black. A 1969 black boycott of the schools produced two important results: the board promised to work for and did secure an act of the legislature restructuring the board to ensure the election of blacks. Three blacks now serve on the nine-member board. The board also agreed to have an outside agency study its administrative structure with the result that of 11 assistant superintendents three are black. In 1972, after Judge McRae's busing order was issued, an organization of whites known as Citizens Against Busing (CAB) conducted a two-day boycott that removed more than 56,000 students—40 per cent of the total—from the schools. In September, 1972, enrollment fell to 138,000—fully 10,000 below the total two years earlier—and on February 5, about two weeks after Plan A was implemented, enrollment was down to 130,000 and blacks made up 60 per cent of the total.

This kaleidoscope of legal maneuvers, pressure-group strategies and statistical changes provides only the barest outline of what has happened in Memphis in the long history of the school desegregation case. A more complex and more illuminating story lies in the actions of powerful and influential Memphians in the final weeks and days leading up to January 24, when the city was finally faced with a court order that could no longer be avoided. The story tells little, if anything, about the educational side of school desegregation, about what has happened and is happening inside the classrooms; that chronicle has barely begun, and its telling will remain for another time. But what the adults of Memphis have said and done publicly and privately to accept the beginning of desegregation or to resist it seems more important now, for it is the actions of adults that will ultimately determine what options their children have.

"IMPACT . . not the pros, not the cons, just the facts"

On the first of March, spring was making an early bow in Memphis. The little clutch of ducks that live on the roof of the Sheraton-Peabody Hotel exited from an elevator promptly at 7 a.m., right on schedule, and waddled over to the fountain in the lobby for their daily swim beneath the overhanging fronds of a giant bird of paradise. Out on the streets, buses taking children to school had become a familiar sight, and there was not much in the papers or on television about the subject that had preoccupied the city for six months. Somehow, Memphis seemed to be returning to normal.

In the offices of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce, just off the lobby of the Sheraton-Peabody, David Cooley was cleaning out his desk. After four and a half years as the chamber's executive director he was leaving to head the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, and he was in a reflective mood. "We've been working hard to help the leadership of this community address problems before they reach crisis proportions," he said. "When I came here

in July of 1968, Martin Luther King had been murdered, people were scared, guilt-ridden, blacks and whites were estranged. This Chamber of Commerce has done something about that. I'm not taking any credit—the business community did it. They've acted for the good of the town, even though it was often against their personal feelings. The race situation here is better now. Things are not going to be back like they were, ever again. The atmosphere here is more conducive to good work than ever before."

When Judge McRae first told Memphis school officials in April, 1972, that they would have to bus students to achieve desegregation, Cooley and the leaders of the chamber started getting ready. Through the spring and summer they met with school officials and community organizations, and by fall they were prepared to support peaceful implementation of Plan A. J. Mac Holladay, a young Navy veteran and Memphis native just back from Vietnam, was hired by Cooley and assigned to work full-time on the school crisis, and Herald Latham, a public relations man whose firm had been retained by the chamber to "sell Memphis," was given a similar assignment. With the school board split into anti-busing, pro-busing and middle-of-the road factions and with the board's staff unable to break the logjam, the chamber found itself at odds with the community's political leadership and with the masses of white citizens—and closer than it had ever been to the city's blacks.

In October, chamber officials led in the formation of IMPACT—Involved Memphis Parents Assisting Children and Teachers. The school board, through a continuation of its federal Emergency School Assistance Program grant, contracted with the chamber to implement IMPACT's program to work in earnest on community acceptance of desegregation.

"This project, and the peaceful events of January 24, were a maturing victory for the clear-thinking people of this town," Cooley said. "It had to be done. We don't want this town to go down the drain. I'm damn proud of what we accomplished—and I say that knowing that the job is far from over. We didn't defend busing, or the quality of education. We couldn't, it's not there, and it's probably not going to be there in my lifetime or yours. What we defended was abiding by the law, and preserving public education in this city, this country. Public education *has* to be salvaged—it's vital, essential. Without it, all of our major institutions are threatened. So we have to change."

IMPACT was launched early in November. "This program," said the Rev. James H. Holmes, the chairman, "has been developed over the past several weeks out of a groundswell of interest from parents, students, teachers, citizens generally, and a number of organizations." At that point, it did, indeed, have the support of a diverse group of people, but the idea for the organization was seven months old by then. Cooley, chamber president Frank M. Norfleet, Latham, Holladay, a task force of establishment leaders—most of them chamber members—and representatives of the school system, the

Urban League and several other community organizations had had a hand in the early planning. By the time IMPACT was announced, its plan of action was already mapped out: newspaper and television advertisements, fact sheets, a telephone rumor control system, neighborhood meetings, a speakers bureau, church and organizational support, research and trouble-shooting were all included in the strategy.

The Southern Regional Council in Atlanta was invited by leaders of the chamber, the black community and the school system to assist IMPACT in its program, and three representatives of the Council were in Memphis during December and January as participant-observers.

The anti-busing forces, meanwhile, were also busy. At a rally early in September, the chairman of Citizens Against Busing, Ken Keele, brandished a two-by-four board in his right hand and told the crowd, "The very first day, the very first moment that any bus rolls in front of any school, we want a phone call, and we'll meet those buses and they won't run." Also at the rally were two members of the school board, William Ray Ingram and Neal Small, and Memphis Mayor Wyeth Chandler. CAB could claim the backing of virtually every white politician in the city, and the support-in principle, at least—of state legislators, congressmen, Tennessee's two U. S. senators and the President of the United States.

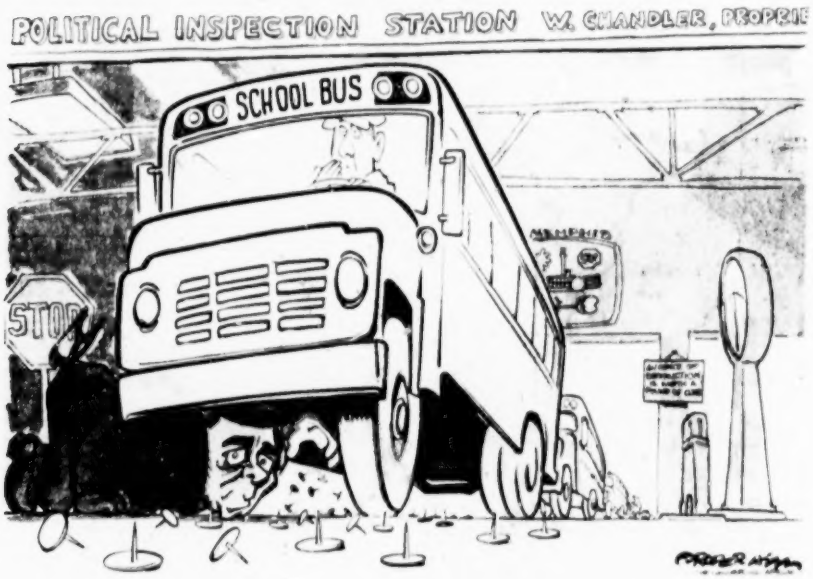
Against such formidable opposition, IMPACT stuck to a simple line of defense: maintenance of public education as a viable institution, and maintenance of law and order. Its most effective advertisement was a picture of one of the city's biggest high schools with a "For Sale" sign in front of it. The ad said in part: "This is what can happen to our entire public school system if we don't get together and work things out." The message on television ended with a catchy identification: "IMPACT—not the pros, not the cons, just the facts."

James Holmes, the IMPACT chairman and an official of the United Methodist Church, described the organization as "a force, a front group, a flak-catcher—a little of all three. The chamber didn't inject itself—it made commitments and then left us alone. We were a meld of the chamber, school officials, organization representatives and just plain citizens. The IMPACT task force, made up of real establishment people, was never out front, but it kept pressure on the chamber to stay the course, and it got the wealthiest men in the city to sign a newspaper ad urging obedience to the law. As for the IMPACT committee—the people who were on the firing line—some tremendous growth took place in that group. We found resources we didn't even know we had."

One member of that group was Bob Knott, a young insurance company representative. "I had some misgivings," he recalled, "but race didn't enter into it. I think integration is our highest necessity; we've got to have it. I used to be a teacher, and I have an abiding concern for education. As for busing, it's the only way now, but it's not the best way." Knott is a Republican

and a native of Memphis. "I belong to a church that has lost two-thirds of its members since Dr. King was killed," he said. "I thought those of us who were left were pretty much together, but most of them have given me the cold shoulder since I became involved in IMPACT. The same thing has happened in a lot of churches: There's no real community. The people fighting busing define community as that area served by their branch bank. The only real community in this city is among blacks."

Knott described the 150 to 200 people most directly involved in the IMPACT program as "the same bunch, unfortunately, who always work on every cause: white middle- and upper-class women, mostly liberals, the League of Women Voters, the Panel of American Women, the Urban League, and so forth. You always pick up a few new ones, including some conservatives and some poor people. Blacks generally lack the wealth or the time or the experience to do a lot of this kind of work. There were no more than 10 in IMPACT—but, of course, the NAACP and the Urban League have had their own programs going. We had a 14-member steering committee of eight whites and six blacks that worked like hell, and we caught a lot of flak, but when the crisis was on us we mobilized 2,000 people. Holladay pulled us together, and we were a community in the truest sense."



From the Memphis Commercial Appeal. Reprinted with permission.

"I cannot and will not urge any parent
to send his child into a ghetto school..."

From the Memphis Commercial Appeal. Reprinted with permission.

The city's two newspapers, by all accounts, did a superlative job of covering the school crisis. One *Commercial Appeal* reporter in particular—Jimmie Covington—was meticulously factual in his coverage of the conflicting activities on all sides. Both papers took editorial positions that closely paralleled the chamber's stance.

When the court came and all the options were reduced to two, the opposing sides lined up about as follows: Those who stood for implementing the court order included IMPACT, the chamber, six members of the school board, all but two or three members of the board's staff, the city's black leadership and most blacks generally, the newspapers, a goodly number of community organizations, the city's recently-appointed director of police, and a substantial percentage of students and teachers of both races. Those who still opposed implementation included CAB members and sympathizers, a number of churches, many politicians (including the mayor and a majority of the city council) three members of the school board, and a larger number of students and some teachers. The city's colleges and universities were not particularly active one way or the other, and most religious and political leaders who did not openly support CAB tended to be neutral and therefore ineffectual. One notable exception was Bishop Carroll Dozier of the Catholic Church's Memphis diocese, who issued a pastoral letter in which he strongly supported desegregation by busing. Among Protestant leaders, the Presbyterians, Methodists and Episcopalians took the strongest stands in support of IMPACT's efforts.

A week before busing was to begin, police arrested a 25-year-old white man and accused him of attempting to hire himself out to damage the buses and incapacitate them "for a sum of money." Ken Keele, the CAB leader, had notified police after the man, Robert Lawrence Payne, had approached him with the offer. Keele worked closely with the police in apprehending the man. "We have not advocated violence or even scheduled demonstrations or picketing," Keele said later. "The only way to stop busing is not to have children on the buses."

When all efforts to stop the buses by legal means had failed, Keele and CAB called for a total boycott of the schools and began setting up private schools throughout the white neighborhoods of the city, with churches providing most of the facilities. Several politicians, including Mayor Chandler and State Senator Curtis Person Jr., joined in the boycott call, and in Washington, Tennessee Senator William E. Brook vowed that busing would be outlawed eventually and urged the anti-busing forces not to lose faith.

"...sound law enforcement"

In the frantic maneuvering of the final days, the role of the city's police force was crucial. The year 1972 had been devastating to the reputation of the police; crime in the city was at an all-time high, several policemen and sheriff's deputies had been indicted on murder charges in the beating death of a black youth, bribery and extortion charges had been lodged against several people in the police department, and internal dissension in the department was rampant. In December, a former Marine general named Jay W. Hubbard was brought in as director of the department, and the

tense situation surrounding the busing controversy became his first test.

Hubbard passed with flying colors. "I can't imagine how Chandler could have hired a man like that," a prominent Memphis attorney remarked. "He must have thought getting a hard-nosed military man would be a safe bet. He must regret it now."

Hubbard is a crew-cut, square-jawed man with a quiet manner and a disarming directness about him. Handsome and youthful looking after 32 years in the Marines, he exudes confidence and goes about his job with military precision. "The police here have been understaffed, underpaid, underequipped and underqualified," he said in his office. "I was persuaded by the challenge here. I see it as a kind of military assignment. The tasks that need doing in this country can't be done without sound law enforcement."

The busing crisis offered Hubbard an opportunity to demonstrate his philosophy of law enforcement. "When the date for busing arrived," he said, "we wanted it done in a normal environment—no force, no strong-arm tactics, no sea of uniforms. We were totally mobilized and ready, but we were in the background, not in the schools or on the buses. Our main contribution was in advance planning—the routes, deployment, rumor control and so forth. It went on for weeks, and we were candid about what we would do, but we didn't want anybody but school people involved in the actual movement of children.

"I know we've got some men with deep racial bias, but a real professional has to subordinate his personal feelings to his duty. We had a job to do, and we did it. Our precept is, 'If you can't be nice, be neutral. Don't mix personal hangups with your badge.' I think we've got a fairly enlightened and progressive department, but it's going to be better. Out of 1,140 officers, less than 10 per cent are black, and that's going to change. We're also increasing and broadening the training of officers."

Hubbard, speaking of his own early education in a predominantly Mexican-American school in the Southwest, expressed the belief that "kids and school people in Memphis can work things out" if adults will leave them alone. "Either we mean equal opportunity or we don't—and I mean it. I'm not for giving favors to blacks, even though there's clearly been a history of discrimination against them—I think it would be insulting to them to suggest that they should simply be handed things. But equal opportunity is essential. We need breakthroughs, we need to be making yards, and we've only been making inches. Attitudes have to change."

What Memphis did January 24 made Hubbard proud, and he thinks it will pay dividends in the future. "The restraint of this community was an hour of greatness," he said, "and it's still alive—it may even spill over into other things. I personally don't approve of busing—it's phony, probably one of the most arrogant forms of government intrusion into the realm of individual rights. But it's not worth blowing up the city about. There must be better ways to get equal opportunity. I don't see that busing gives young

blacks all that much more opportunity. The challenge is to bring better education to the poor communities, to attract good teachers. But the contrasts are so great—there is television, pounding into the consciousness of the poor: buy, buy, buy. Yet there is no way for them to earn enough to buy all that stuff."

Before January 24, black citizens were upset over what might happen to the children being bused, and a local black organization (PUSH) announced that its representatives were going to ride on the buses and follow them to protect the children. The drivers—80 per cent of which were black and 90 per cent of whom were women—went to PUSH and requested protection. The drivers also had some serious labor disputes with the Kansas City company supplying the buses. At that point PUSH announced that it would protect the drivers, and that if the bus company did not deal fairly with the drivers the buses would not roll. A meeting was held among top school officials, PUSH representatives, the drivers, and bus company representatives in which the driver's fears and grievances were aired. Later another meeting was held with the same cast, including, this time, the bus company manager. At this meeting the drivers' apprehensions and grievances were resolved.

"Change pierces the city like a riverboat whistle"

Finally, after all the tumult, the buses rolled. Plan A dealt principally with elementary schools (a few junior highs were also included). In all, 45 of the city's 160 schools were affected by the plan, and about 25,000 students were reassigned, including 12,000 (7,000 of them black) who were eligible for bus transportation. Most of the 6,000 whites to be bused were absent the first day, and so were some blacks, and although estimates on total absenteeism varied widely, it is generally agreed that close to 40,000 children (including perhaps 5,000 blacks) stayed away and almost 100,000 were in school. The next day, about 28,000 were absent, and by Friday, the third day, the figure fell to 25,000 and about 9,000 students rode the buses. Within a week, absenteeism had fallen to about 10,000—about 3,000 above what school officials consider normal.

CAB officials estimated that about 75 per cent of the white enrollment—some 42,000 students—participated in the boycott. If that is true—and the figure conflicts sharply with data from school officials—then the boycott at its height was less effective than the one CAB staged in the spring of 1972, after the court's busing order was first handed down. In any event, Memphis began desegregation and busing peacefully—there were no serious incidents, and no arrests—and within a week, tensions had eased and opposing forces were regrouping for the next stage.

But more than 6,000 of the students who left the public schools didn't come back. Virtually all of them were white, and most of them turned either to existing private schools in the city or to the new CAB schools. By

the middle of February, CAB claimed to have 28 schools opened and almost 8,000 students enrolled. CAB hired a young graduate student, Blythe Robinson, as superintendent of its schools, but Robinson resigned in less than a month. Keele said Robinson left to finish work on a degree, but Robinson said Keele should "tell the whole story," and he added, "For my own sake and because of the innocent people concerned, I hesitate at this time to go into all the reasons involved in my decision." Said Keele in response: "I am not going to get in a word battle with him. He had misrepresented some things."

Later, at his home, Robinson said he could not talk for the record about his involvement with CAB because "I was put in a difficult position. In order to get paid, I had to sign a legal agreement that I wouldn't tell anything about CAB."

Some ministers in the city said in February that they had been "pressured" to support the CAB schools, and a resolution expressing resentment against such tactics was introduced at a pastor's conference of the Shelby County Baptist Association, but the resolution was not voted on.

Network television coverage of the changeover in Memphis was brief and misleading. Walter Cronkite devoted about ten seconds to the subject on the CBS evening news the day busing began, saying that in excess of 40,000 students were absent and implying that all of them were white (in fact, a substantial number were black). ABC television also made a brief report, and NBC reported a week later on registration in the CAB schools. That was the extent of television coverage by the networks. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* had running stories for a couple of days, and Jon Nordheimer of the *Times* wrote an interpretive piece that drew mixed reactions from Memphians. "Change has never been a welcome word for most of the 625,000 residents of Memphis," Nordheimer wrote, "yet change pierces the city like a riverboat's whistle." He went on to describe some recent and current events in the city that both encourage and restrict change. "It was just some more of that Northern crap we've come to expect from the *New York Times*," said one incensed Memphian, but another said, "He was right on target. We *are* still living in the shadow of old Boss Crump."

Perhaps the most damaging outside publicity—at least in the eyes of school and chamber officials—was a February 19 story by Gregory Jaynes in the *Atlanta Constitution*. The headline said "20,000 Students Drop Out In Memphis Busing Furor," while the story itself said enrollment had dropped 7,532 between January 5 and February 5, and that "In all, close to 20,000 students have pulled out since the busing fight began a little more than two years ago." The story dealt mostly with the white response to busing and to the efforts of CAB, and it generally painted a picture of Memphis as a city in utter chaos. At one point Jaynes, a former Memphis resident, wrote: "And the hate talk, open conflict, and public meetings that end in bitter shouting matches are at a higher pitch than they were during

the riots of 1968 in the bloody aftermath of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination."

"That distorted coverage hurt us," David Cooley said in his office at the Chamber of Commerce, and some members of the school board expressed the same view.

"Choice is what only the wealthy have"

The CAB organization in Memphis, like anti-busing groups in other parts of the country, has gotten its strength from the large numbers of white parents who, for a variety of reasons, are passionately opposed to making the adjustments and sacrifices that are demanded by any effort to achieve school integration. Just how large that number is would be impossible to say. CAB claims to have 5,000 dues-paying members; in a city population that includes about 400,000 whites, that is not a large number. But without a doubt, far more than 5,000 Memphians have at one time or another given financial or physical or at least verbal support to the CAB movement, and from the available evidence it would seem a safe guess that a clear majority of the city's whites are sympathetic with the basic objectives, if not the tactics, of CAB.

The whites in Memphis who oppose busing are not a monolithic group; not even those who are actively involved with CAB are completely united. Some are unabashed white racists, people whose lives are very nearly structured around, even defined by, their fear and hatred of black people. Some are poor people who see what little they can lay claim to threatened by the prospect of black competition on an equal footing—their homes, their jobs, the schools their children have always attended. Some are resentful of government intervention in their lives, of being told and shown what they already know to be true: that, unlike people with money and power, they cannot have freedom of choice. Some are people who have worked hard to gain the trappings of middle-class society, and do not want to open the rites of passage into that society to others who are "different." Some are middle- and upper-class people by birth, by inheritance—people who have little in common with working-class and lower-class whites except skin color—and the social incest that has restricted and impoverished their understanding of black Americans renders them almost incapable of perceiving what the urge for equality is all about. And all of them, in and out of CAB, can fundamentally and fairly be said to lack the conviction that in a city where 400,000 whites and 265,000 blacks coexist, one group cannot have peace or freedom or ultimately even survival unless the other has it, too.

Inside CAB, the mixed motives and perceptions of individual people have at times produced conflicts that barely show above the surface. There have been internal disputes over tactics, with some people advocating physical acts of resistance to the orders of the court and others counseling less overt

behavior, some favoring recruitment of blacks who disapprove of busing and others opposing it vehemently, some advocating pressure on vulnerable whites to participate in the movement and others resisting that approach. The schools CAB has opened have been almost literally organized overnight, and in that frantic process there have been bitter disputes between what could be called the educational and the political wings of CAB. One disgruntled CAB supporter, speaking anonymously after a particularly stormy and vitriolic encounter, summed up the internal splits like this:

"I have a philosophical commitment to freedom from big government. I'm against forced busing because it's not what the people want, and this is supposed to be a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Education in this country was based on religion, and I want to see Bible-reading and prayer restored. I want to see discipline restored, too. CAB has stressed the importance of all these things, and that's why I joined. But what is happening is that some people are trying to make political hay out of it, and some are trying to make money out of the schools. They talk about their religious convictions in public, but they get in these meetings and cuss a lot—one woman called the children we're trying to serve 'little bastards'—and they bring drinks to the meetings. There's a lot more than race to it. The so-called leaders are a sorry bunch. Some of them are so idealistic they can't face the facts—they're against busing more than they're for education. This school system has been thrown together. They've been hiring people over the phone, without interviews or credentials or anything. That's just not right. A lot of good people are involved, but the hard-core people are the problem. Let's face it: There are always going to be citizens against busing, even if there's no more CAB, and the farther the public schools are pushed on forced busing, the more resistance there will be. But it won't help to have white racists and black racists churning up the waters. The kids are just pawns—nobody really cares about them. I think Keele is in it for the principle; I have no personal complaints against him. But too many of the others are really harming the children."

Ken Keele is indeed "in it for the principle." He estimates that he has devoted 30 hours a week or more to CAB for the past six or eight months, and his small food-brokerage business is suffering: "If I stop, it stops—and I've had to neglect it a lot." Working out of an office in an apartment complex in south Memphis, he stays busy seven days a week trying to hold things together. In the office on a comparatively quiet Saturday afternoon, he talked about what drives him:

"I'm an ultra-conservative. I come from a conservative family. I think the federal government has gotten too blasted big. I've seen the trends of socialism and communism coming through the schools, and I finally got sick of what I was seeing. Judicial tyranny led me to this fight, and I'll sacrifice whatever is necessary to win it. I've got three children—that's why I'm in it. Too many people are not willing to stand up and be counted.

We're going to see the destruction of public education unless the federal judges stop this insanity.

"I started this movement in Memphis. Violence is the worst thing that could happen here. It's no answer. We tried boycotts, but they failed because they didn't give people any alternative. The law says children have to go to school. But the law also says in Tennessee that anybody can start a private school on a temporary basis as long as they meet the requirements of the safety and fire codes. So that's what we're doing, and we'll work on through toward accreditation. We're in it to stay, as long as we can't have neighborhood schools.

"We started the private school movement two weeks before busing. Some people took a brief look and said it couldn't be done, but we were determined, and foolish enough to go ahead, and within two weeks we had 27 schools open, and over 5,000 children in class. Human resources and determination can do what needs to be done—and the quality of our schools is second to none. Our teachers are certified. I can show you an order for $40,000 worth of new textbooks—the same books they use in the public schools. We've got everything but a chemistry lab, and we're going to get that. Of course, we hope ultimately to get back into the public schools. We'll get a Constitutional amendment outlawing busing, and we'll be back in eventually.

"We pay our teachers $20 a day, and we charge $25 a month for one child, and slightly less for each additional child from the same family. If parents can't afford the cost, we have scholarships provided by donations from businesses and by various money-making projects."

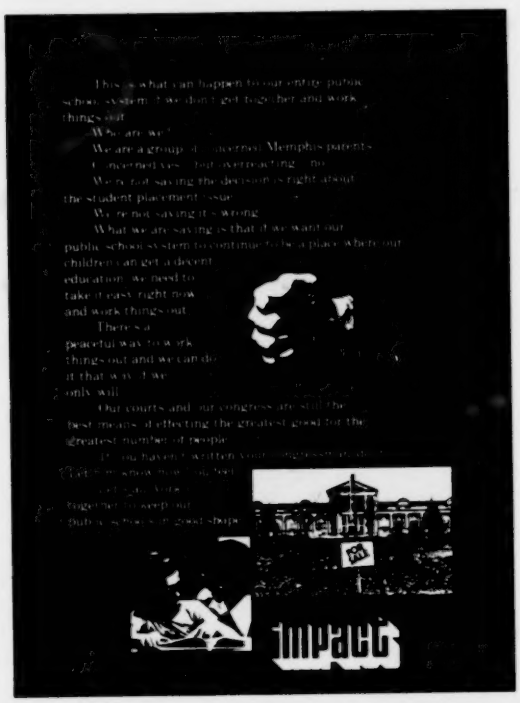
Keele expressed some resentment against the efforts of some churches to open private schools that are too costly for working-class people: "That new Southern Baptist system is going to cost a lot—$1,000 just to join, and tuition above that. Harding Academy, which is operated by the Church of Christ—my church—is the most costly private school in Memphis. I personally resent my church making education too costly for its members."

How much does race have to do with his feelings and actions? "I have no hangups on black people," Keele said, "if they're Christian, and believe as I do in individual rights, in discipline, in keeping up their property and so forth. And they should expect the same of me. As long as they believe in God and country, and abide by the Bible, that's fine with me. My children were in integrated schools. They were exposed to blacks. We have two black children in our schools, and four black teachers on the payroll. Many people fail to realize one fact: Choice is what only the wealthy have, while we're told we *must* do this, and we have no right of appeal. I'll defy, until I'm six feet under, a federal judge telling me I *must* mix, I can't live where I want to. If the public schools would stop turning out illiterates and stop this Communist intrusion, a lot of people would go back. No, it's not a racial thing, not with me, anyway."

As a Christian anti-Communist and a devotee of neighborhood schools, Keele can take both comfort and alarm from the government and religious leaders to whom he pledges allegiance. President Nixon is building bridges to the Communist world and promising to rebuild the bridges and dikes and cities of North Vietnam—and he is also promising the return of neighborhood schools, and government aid to private schools in the bargain. Many churches seem willing to get into the private school business—even as the Catholic Church appears to be trying to get out—but as often as not, they are pricing what Keele calls "just average people" out of the market, leaving the masses of whites to remain with most blacks and other minorities in the public schools. What the people in CAB are left with is their own limited resources—and the empty promises of political and religious leaders who may share their attitudes and beliefs, but not their powerlessness or their poverty. It is not so much the true believers in CAB who threaten public education in Memphis as it is the thousands of whites who want to retain, without sharing, the advantages American society has given them—and who have the money to do it. As Keele himself said, "Choice is what only the wealthy have."

"... unlawful activities are no solution to the problem"

Looking back on the crucial weeks of January in Memphis, it is possible to see how a classic conflict developed between two powerful forces, and



how that conflict came to be temporarily resolved without violence.

There was, on one side, the coalition of forces that included IMPACT, the Chamber of Commerce, part of the school board and staff, most of the city's black leadership and an assortment of individuals and organizations committed to successful implementation of the court's school desegregation order.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of that coalition. It was not unique—other cities in the South have made similar efforts to face desegregation, and the same week that Memphis did it, the Washington suburb of Prince Georges County, Maryland, mobilized in much the same way—but the Memphis effort seems especially noteworthy because it succeeded against the formidable opposition of politicians at every level of government and against the massive resistance of thousands of white citizens.

Within the school system, six members of the Board of Education and the top leadership of the board's staff contributed directly and consistently to the effort to bring about smooth implementation. They worked closely with IMPACT and other organizations. They helped to mobilize volunteer workers to aid in the transition. They cooperated with the press and took numerous steps on their own to keep accurate information flowing and to squelch rumors, and they invested considerable time and money in the preparation of teachers and administrators for their new assignments.

The Chamber of Commerce, principally through IMPACT, made peaceful implementation of the court order its highest priority, and the chamber's overall contribution was extensive. The blue-ribbon task force of community leaders that affiliated itself behind the scenes with IMPACT was made up almost entirely of chamber members, and it was representatives of that body who got 33 of the city's richest and most powerful men to sign a newspaper advertisement urging all citizens to "deal with this situation in a calm and rational way," because "disruptive and unlawful activities are no solution to the problem." Perhaps the most important signer of that ad was ex-mayor Henry Loeb, who had earlier expressed his support for the anti-busing forces. The IMPACT steering committee and the 2,000 volunteers they mobilized were less well-known than the members of the task force or the signers of the ad, but their contributions were not diminished by that fact. Many of them worked exhaustively for weeks, and got little in return except the hostility their exposure aroused.

In the black community, the NAACP and the Urban League were deeply engaged in the implementation effort, and many influential black citizens, working both as individuals and as members of one or another of the organizations in the coalition, made vital contributions.

In spite of all those cooperative efforts, peaceful compliance with the court order was not assured until the buses finally began picking up children on January 24. As early as the first week in January, school officials acknowledged that hundreds of white students were withdrawing from the schools.

A statement concerning public schools.

Our public school system is facing another change.

No matter how we feel about busing, if we think the matter through, we must agree that disruptive and unlawful activities are no solution to the problem.

We urge all citizens of Memphis to deal with this situation in a calm and rational way, to seek the answer in the courts and congress.

The Memphis city schools and the children of this city need our support, now and for the future.

Let's all stand together to give them the best our community can provide.

Walter Armstrong
Milton S. Binswanger, Jr.
Martin Condon III
Ned Cook
Sam Cooper
W. D. Galbreath
M. M. "Jack" Gordon
John J. Heflin
Sam B. Hollis
George M. Houston
R. M. Hunt
Wallace E. Johnson
Frank A. Jones, Jr.
Cullen Kehoe, Jr.
S. L. Kopald, Jr.
Henry Loeb
James C. Merkle
Lewis K. McKee
Allen Morgan
Frank M. Norfleet
Joe Orgill, III
Abe Plough
Wayne W. Pyeatt
Herbert Rhea
William H. Russell
Ernest P. Schmacher
Robert G. Snowden
W. H. Smythe III
Tim Treadwell III
Earl H. Triplett
Lawrence S. Wade
A. Maceo Walker
H. Howard Willey
Kemmons Wilson

An anti-busing group known as Parents for Saving Our Schools tried unsuccessfully to get a federal grand jury to indict federal and state officials and members of the school board for acting to implement what the group called "illegal" court orders. The Memphis City Council, at the urging of Mayor Chandler, tried a number of legal ploys to stop the buses. With its ten white members usually voting together against its three black members, the council passed one ordinance requiring stringent new safety regulations for buses, and then tried to enforce a 40-year-old ordinance requiring bus operators to have a "certificate of public convenience and necessity" from the city before being allowed to run. Both efforts were stopped by injunctions from the federal court. U. S. Representative Dan Kuykendall of Memphis and Tennessee's junior Republican U. S. senator, William E. Brock, made statements in January promising relief for Memphis through anti-busing legislation or an amendment to the Constitution, and while they did not advise defiance of the court order in the meantime, they pointedly refrained from urging the opponents of busing to go along with it until relief could be found. At schools scattered around the city, there were sporadic walkouts and demonstrations in protest of busing. After the court blocked the city's attempt to enforce the 40-year-old ordinance, Mayor Chandler told a group of anti-busing parents, "I cannot and will not urge any parent to send his child into a ghetto school," and he added: "It appears we temporarily may have lost the fight against busing—we will enforce the law and protect the children. But I hope you won't give up the fight against busing until we have restored sanity to the neighborhood schools." On the weekend before busing began, delegates from anti-busing organizations in 13 states and the District of Columbia met in Memphis to form a national organization, and they were part of a crowd of 2,000 persons who attended a rally at which Ken Keele of CAB called for a total boycott.

Somehow, the potentially explosive atmosphere of the last days before busing never broke through the bounds of nonviolence. "Just when CAB was having its big national rally and Chandler was urging resistance, Jay Hubbard made it clear that the police were going to enforce the court order, and that sobered this town up," said one active participant in the final weeks of controversy. Another pointed out that when ex-Mayor Loeb signed the newspaper ad urging calm obedience to the law, "he really isolated Chandler—because it's generally believed that Loeb still is in charge at City Hall." Others cited the efforts of black leaders, the chamber and the school system to defuse a potentially volatile dispute between black bus drivers and the Kansas City-based company supplying the buses as another example of the kind of quick action by cooperative forces that ultimately spelled success. And, said another participant, "when Ken Keele turned in the guy who offered to blow up the buses, that must have let a lot of people know they couldn't get away with violence."

". . . a victory for Memphis"

After the first day of busing came and went without disruption, there were complaints that national press coverage—particularly television—had "strained to make Memphis an anti-busing success story, another Canarsie." The people who had worked for compliance with the court order generally felt vindicated by the events of the first day, though they were concerned about absenteeism and uncertain about how much of it would be permanent. The CAB forces claimed success for their boycott, but school officials were quick to point out that it was nowhere near total, and one high official in the schools later said flatly, "They tried to shut us down, but we beat the hell out of them."

In the last week of January, when absenteeism was declining and the emotion of the period was beginning to dissipate, one of the people most intimately involved in the chamber-school system-black community-IMPACT coalition said Memphis "has proved that when a city's power structure makes up its mind to face up to an issue like desegregation, it can do it—and do it in an impressive and encouraging way. Even though officials of the local, state and federal governments did all they could to stop busing, there were enough people here who wanted to do the right thing, and they did it. They had different motives, sure—some of them were worried about image, or about their business, some of them acted out of respect for the courts, some of them just wanted all the turmoil to end, and some really wanted the schools to be desegregated—but they were willing to pull together for the same objective, and the result was a victory for Memphis."

A brief hiatus followed the hectic weeks, and many Memphians appeared to welcome the release from tension and controversy. But not everyone had the luxury of a time for thoughtful reflection. The school board faced an early March deadline for submitting to Judge McRae its proposals for completing the job of desegregation they had begun with the implementation of Plan A. More busing would clearly be required, for 115 of the city's schools had been untouched by the first phase of change, and most of them remained segregated. The board's staff had been working on several alternative plans, and members of the board appeared deeply and perhaps irreconcilably divided. The black community in general was accepting desegregation and busing cooperatively and seemed ready for complete reassignment to take place. Whites, on the other hand, appeared to gravitate toward one of three alternatives: Many were fleeing to private schools; another group, much larger, seemed destined to remain in the public schools, if only because they lacked the money to move; and the rest were committed to public education and to integration, and expressed a determination to stay and make it work.

CAB continued without pause to develop alternatives to the public schools, and other private schools announced opening plans. East Park

Baptist Church said it was leading in the formation of the Briarcliff Baptist School system, with 12 new elementary schools to open next fall and a high school to be added a year later. The elementary schools, a church spokesman said, will be located in Southern Baptist churches in the city, and an estimated 2,400 students will enroll in them. "This has been under study for two years," the spokesman said. "We're definitely not connected with the CAB schools—we're in no way trying to oppose desegregation. Our interest is in academic excellence, and we aim to be the best quality school in Memphis. The Catholics and the Church of Christ have quality schools, but the Baptists don't. Now we will."

Compelled by necessity to press on in preparation for September, the people involved in both the public schools and the private schools could not afford to rest. In both camps, conflicting forces were at work—morality, the requirements of the law, racism, animosity, fear, idealism. Some still hoped for reconciliation; others were resigned to permanent division.

IMPACT, one step removed from the schools themselves, entered March in the unaccustomed atmosphere of calm. "The problem we face now," said Bob Knott of IMPACT, "is holding together. For three months, we were in the midst of a continual crisis. Now that crisis has passed, and I wonder whether we can crank up again in preparation for September. We were together out of dedication and out of ignorance—we didn't know what would happen. Now we know more, we see the whole picture. Ignorance—the total absence of knowing how to proceed—was really an asset; we just went ahead. Now we'll be trying to follow the pattern we set, and I doubt if we can do it. You can't sell a similar car the same way twice—that's not selling, it's taking an order. The strategy will have to change. We did a job, and now that's over, and there's another job to do. This time it'll be a lot harder. But I'd do it again—and in every city, somebody better be doing it."

"He's made this community aware of itself"

Mac Holladay, the chamber staff member who held the pieces of IMPACT together, faces the prospect of reorganizing for the second phase. Whether the chamber will devote as much time and energy to desegregation a second time will depend on who replaces David Cooley in the top job, and the people who knew Cooley best say he will be difficult to replace. Cooley, more than any other single person, is mentioned as the man who brought the Memphis business community together for the desegregation fight. "He's done three things here that he can be proud of," said Herald Latham, the chamber's public relations consultant. "The bridge between blacks and whites has been built over his back; he has made the active leadership of this community aware of the interrelatedness of problems; and he's made this

community aware of itself. 'When are we gonna get off the nigger problem?' some businessmen used to ask, and Cooley's answer was, 'What you call the nigger problem is the basis of all the other problems.' I think a lot of people learned that lesson, and Cooley's departure won't erase that. I'm optimistic."

Latham, Holladay, Knott and others who were closely involved with IMPACT share a natural pride in its contribution, and there can be little doubt that the organization was instrumental, perhaps essential, in the peaceful implementation of Plan A. The CAB forces, in the hostility they showed to the effort, are a measure of proof that it was effective. But IMPACT has also been accused of being "do-gooders for the moment, without any long-term commitment," and for "backing into involvement apologetically." Richard Fields, a staff member of the Legal Defense Fund, said of IMPACT, "I keep getting the feeling they aren't really talking about integration. It's like they're saying, 'We don't like busing either, but we want to obey the law.' They did a good job of publicity and public relations, and maybe they just felt they couldn't take the community with them if they hit any harder. They were really established because the Chamber of Commerce felt it couldn't do the job itself. But the chamber should have just come out in the open. It got blamed anyway, so what difference did it make?"

The Rev. James Lawson, a United Methodist Church minister, has been active and influential in the black quest for justice in Memphis for the past 10 years. "The black community has brought the white business community into a number of issues over the years," he said. "Even in the late 1950's they were confronted, and in the past decade the power structure has been faced time and time again. IMPACT may suggest that they are now taking some initiatives instead of simply reacting, but I'm somewhat skeptical. Had the chamber not played such a low-key, background role, had IMPACT been made up of visible community leaders instead of relatively unknown people, had they spoken directly to the need for justice and equity, I would feel differently. But I will say that Dave Cooley has been a good ally. He has brought the chamber a long way in its understanding of the need for change. He never let up, he worked persistently with his board, and he was able to question some of their myths and fears."

Lawson expressed some optimism about changes he has seen in Memphis in the past five years—and tempered it with some criticism. "Since 1968 there has been a fairly sizeable explosion of concern among individuals and social service organizations of various kinds. A lot of people have gotten involved as volunteers, and the employment picture has improved. Still, it hasn't affected institutional change very much. We've got a foundation to build on, but one of the biggest drawbacks is political leadership. We are far better as a people than our politics or our politicians. The police situation is better, the press is better, Memphis State University has begun to make a contribution, but the University of Tennessee, which has more power,

has been less help. The Board of Education is still unprepared to give leadership to the community. We've still got a long way to go."

Just how far Memphis had to go before its educational crisis would be over could be seen as the school board wrestled in the early days of March with its desegregation plans for the fall. In the offices of the Legal Defense Fund, attorney William Caldwell reviewed the latest efforts of the board to prepare a plan for September. "Nothing they've come up with yet is satisfactory by a long shot," he said. "The board's approach has been to pacify the whites in Memphis, to placate their fears. I don't think it's as bad as they make it seem. They can't adopt a plan that's less than the Constitution requires just to assuage whites. We could desegregate every school in the system without busing any child more than 50 minutes, and Tennessee law allows a maximum of one and a half hours. And, it could be done for no more than 3 per cent of the school budget. The state average for transportation costs is 4 per cent."

"Eventually, things will stabilize"

Caldwell is optimistic that Judge McRae will require a complete desegregation plan, and in any event, he feels the LDF "is on strong ground at the appeal level." He is sanguine, too, about the long-term prospects for school integration in Memphis: "Eventually, things will stabilize. By the end of next year, a lot of whites will be back. The alternatives won't survive for any except the wealthiest few, so it should shake down to about a 60 per cent black system, and it could even become majority-white again. We don't have the problems of the worst Northern cities. This isn't St. Louis or Chicago or Detroit—we don't have problems as serious as theirs yet. Even if our schools end up 75 per cent black, it can still be a good school system. Some things are happening here to offer some hope. The business community and the media seem to be on the right track, and the police under Hubbard are a very positive sign. He's what we've needed for a long time. But the politicians are still obstructionist, and that's our biggest liability."

At the Board of Education, the addition of three black board members and some staff changes at the top in the past two years have changed things—and so has the exhaustion of all legal options in the fight against desegregation. "The battle went all the way to the Supreme Court, and every possible avenue has been used," said Shelby Counce, the deputy superintendent. "Now some of us want to go ahead and do the job. I do, the superintendent does, some members of the board do, most of the staff does. Our top priorities have to be a unitary system and the elimination of all racism. I worry sometimes that the entire education profession may not be capable of meeting this challenge, but we've got a lot of good people too, and we've got one of the best race relations staffs in the country, working hard to change attitudes and to prepare our faculty and administrative personnel for the

job ahead. We're going to have stability eventually—not this year or next, but soon after. It could be a 70 per cent black system when it stabilizes, but if we can get out of the legal hassles, out of this fishbowl, with all the unrest and confusion, things will settle down. If we can get a unitary system, then we can get on with the pursuit of quality education."

Memphis desegregated its teaching staffs two years ago, and every school has close to a 60 per cent white-40 per cent black faculty. Among the 11 people at the assistant superintendent level or above, there are three blacks.

The school board includes three blacks and four women. The three blacks—George H. Brown Jr., Carl Johnson and Mrs. Maxine Smith, executive secretary of the local NAACP chapter—have consistently advocated maximum desegregation. Three whites—Neal Small, William Ray Ingram and Mrs. Juanita Watkins—have just as consistently fought for relief from the courts and as little desegregation as possible. The other three whites—Mrs. Frances Coe, Mrs. Barbara Sonnenburg and the president, Hunter Lane Jr.—have tended to be swing voters, siding from time to time with one faction or the other.

While it was getting prepared to implement Plan A, the school board and its staff were also deeply immersed in the design of the second phase of desegregation—a plan for total elimination of the dual school system, which had to be presented to Judge McRae by March 5. A staff committee has been at work on alternative proposals since December, and the board had been meeting frequently to review and revise the committee's efforts.

Half an hour before a scheduled board meeting on March 1, Superintendent John P. Freeman was on the phone. "It's gonna be a lean, hard, mean year, son, so you better get your fighting britches on," he said, and then hung up. He lit up a long, thin cigar and leaned back, looking out the window.

A month earlier, Jerry Robbins and Barney DuBois of the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* had written a story about Freeman in which they quoted him as saying he hoped "the next desegregation plan we develop will be the last." In that interview he talked of being able "to get back to the business of educating children," of establishing "a program that everyone . . . can depend on," of getting into "a period of tranquility, where all races understand we are doing the best we can." Earlier, Freeman had called busing "regressive," and said he favored the neighborhood school system. But when the legal action had come to a climax, he had said, "We have a court order. It is not important whether we as individuals agree or disagree with it. We have to get with the business of complying."

"Segregation won't work"

In his office, Freeman seemed pensive and preoccupied. At 54, he has spent 30 years in the Memphis school system and less than two years as its superintendent, and the strains of the job showed in his face. What had

convinced him, he was asked, that Memphis had to turn from obstruction to positive pursuit of a fully desegregated school system? "If I peeled it all away," he said after a pause, "it comes to this: If this country is going to survive, it's going to survive in the cities. We have to do it. Segregation won't work. The two cultures have got to live side by each, with a broader overlap than in the past. I don't know when I came to that realization. I can't answer that. My children are part of the answer—they've reshaped me, redirected me in some measure. If the cities fail to solve the complexities of crime and all the other problems, we won't make it. It's going to be resolved in the cities—and in my opinion, pretty quickly."

Freeman also talked about other institutions in the society besides schools. "The churches have failed," he said. "With notable exceptions, they are not a viable institution in this community. They will send missionaries to Africa, but people are starving here. I shouldn't be too harsh, but in the main its true. The typical pattern is to preach Christ, and pay your $25 a month, and do nothing. (Freeman, like Keele, is a member of the Church of Christ.)

"Without positive, active, daily political leadership, our job is so much harder. The politicians speak in platitudes. They make promises, they do what is expedient, and then they go back to Washington or wherever. And the colleges—I don't think they've come to grips with it yet. Our younger teachers on the whole may be more humanistic, more flexible, more qualified than our older ones—but if so, I suspect it's more of a result of their generation than their college training. Our professional staff overall is outstanding in its preparation and experience—personally, individually, whether they're competent and prepared to deal effectively with different cultures and different levels of achievement is harder to say. It's hard to get prejudice and insecurity out of people, in spite of some excellent in-service training in human relations.

"The schools are being asked to undertake fundamental social change, and the rest of society seems unwilling to make as much of an effort. We're struggling to get stability in the schools, but if we're left with only poor whites and poor blacks, it'll be a disaster. We could be 70 per cent black next fall."

If all that makes Freeman want to throw in the towel, he doesn't show it. He looks tired, but he also looks tough—and determined. "Are we going to win?" he says, repeating a question. "We have to."

In the board room, sandwiches and coffee had been brought in. When the meeting began at 5 p.m., the black board members were absent. Two of them had angrily walked out of a board meeting the previous evening, after a delicately constructed majority coalition had come apart and a desegregation plan for the city's high schools had been rejected. The plan—called Plan I—would have desegregated all junior and senior high schools. After the blacks had gone, the others voted five to one, with Frances Coe dissenting, for Plan II, which would leave four junior highs and two high schools all-

black. Barbara Sonnenburg and Hunter Lane had been part of the shaky coalition in favor of Plan I; when they switched to opposition, its defeat was assured, and at that point, George Brown and Maxine Smith walked out. Carl Johnson was absent. Now the board was back for another meeting, to consider further desegregation changes needed at the elementary level to complete the job that had begun in January.

"Are we being boycotted?" Neal Small asked, smiling faintly. Nobody seemed to know for sure. The meeting began with O. Z. Stephens, a member of the staff team that had been drafting alternative desegregation plans, explaining in front of a large map one of the team's proposals for the elementary schools. The outline of the school system on the map resembled a horse's head in profile, with the Mississippi River as its mane. Stephens proceeded expertly through a bewildering succession of numbers, percentages, racial ratios, grade organizations, school capacities, bus routes. The plan would make all desegregated elementary schools at least 30 per cent white, but leave 18 all-black. (Overall, the Memphis elementary school enrollment is 65 per cent black.) The strategy, apparently, was to have as high a percentage of whites as possible in every desegregated school, even if it meant leaving some schools segregated.

Problems kept popping up around the room: The physical plant is out of date, and it was built for segregation. The worst schools are the inner city. Whites won't go to those schools. Do you concentrate physically handicapped kids, or disperse them? (And how about slow learners, or discipline problems, or the gifted, or the educable mentally retarded, or pregnant girls?) What should be the maximum time permitted for a one-way bus ride? The City Council has to approve the budget—including the money to contract for bus services—and we'll never get it out of them. CAB is seeking a referendum to allow voters to repeal the one-and-a-half-cent sales tax for schools (it produces over $10 million a year). Every school should be desegregated. No, a 50-50 split should be our objective, even though that will mean several schools will stay all-black.

The hours dragged on. Too many cigarettes, too much coffee. The room had a stale, smoky odor. Eyes were red and baggy, tempers were short. It would be impossible to calculate the number of man-hours the board and staff have put in on the desegregation issue since Judge McRae's April ruling, and the hours have taken their toll.

No vote was taken on the elementary school plan. Discussion turned again to Plan II, the secondary school scheme approved with so much rancor the night before. Some modifications were proposed, and the seemingly endless process continued. At one point, Small said to Freeman, "Did you speak to these plans last night?"

"I didn't have an opportunity to," Freeman replied.

"Would you now?" Small asked him.

"Sure." Freeman was hunched over the table, cigar between his teeth,

looking over the top of his horn-rimmed half-glasses at Small. "Plan II, this plan, has disadvantages compared to Plan I," he said.

Mrs. Coe said the court would never buy Plan II because it left too much segregation. Small said, "Look at Atlanta—the plaintiffs down there are now saying, 'Let us have some black administrators, and we'll let you have some segregation.'" Atlanta is a prime example of what happens when you try to flip-flop a system." Ingram said, "You can't have integration without both races. If you keep on doing things that drive whites out, you'll make integration impossible."

Charles Patterson, director of race relations and a member of the planning team, suggested that the guiding principle should be to show equity and consistency. "That will convince the court of our sincerity," he said—and the unspoken implication was that Plan II lacked either equity or consistency.

Finally, votes were taken on four modifications in Plan II, but the plan itself was not voted on again. Yet another meeting was scheduled for Sunday afternoon, when the board would finally decide on a total elementary and secondary plan for submission to the court the following day.

By then it was 10 o'clock, and the five-hour marathon mercifully came to a close. On the way out, Ingram was asked if he would vote for any plan calling for more desegregation, in light of his opposition throughout. "I haven't decided," he said. "I'm not worried about my constituents. Most of them are not affected anyway."

Frances Coe has been on the school board longer than any other member, and is the most liberal of the white members. The longer the Memphis case has dragged on, the more she has advocated two points of view: that the system must strive for maximum desegregation within reasonable bounds of practicality, and that it must get out of court and get on with its primary responsibilities. Plan I was sometimes called the Coe Plan because of her contributions to it. "I expect [illegible] three segregationists can carry Plan II if they vote," she said. "But I doubt if they'll support it. I think they'll abstain."

". . . tired, worn out, angry, disgusted"

At her home in a quiet and attractive neighborhood two mornings later, Maxine Smith made no bones about the fact that she was "tired, worn out, angry, disgusted." She talked about the efforts that had been made to reach a compromise around the Coe Plan, about how at one point every board member except Ingram had agreed to support it. "Then Sonnenburg came in with Plan II, and the whole thing came apart."

Mrs. Smith is a middle-class black woman who has been fighting civil rights battles in Memphis since 1957, and she is not given to timidity. "I am an integrationist," she said, "because I believe it is the only way for black people to survive in this society." (The day before, another black leader had expressed the same view: "If they will be honest with you, blacks here

generally will say that there's nothing magic in putting black and white children in the same classrooms. But they will also say that the white man puts his heart where his children are, and the goodies will be delivered where whites attend school in numbers, and the only way blacks will get their fair share of those goodies is to be in those schools.")

Her election to the board in a 60 per cent white district—over the opposition of three anti-busing candidates, two of them black—is an indication of Mrs. Smith's persuasiveness and strength as an outspoken advocate of integration. She is pro-black, but she is not anti-white; she speaks highly of John Freeman, David Cooley and some other white leaders in Memphis, and she is equally as forthright in her criticism of the city's political leadership. But the school controversy has left her bitter. "There is so much inconsistency, so much dishonesty," she said. "The whites are afraid of majority-black schools. They can stand a little bit of black, but only a little."

When the board met again on Sunday, the blacks showed up, but no agreement could be reached, and the next day their attorney asked Judge McRae for a one-week postponement. The judge agreed, setting March 12 as the final deadline for submission of the plan.

On March 9, the board came at last to its time of decision. Neal Small presented a resolution calling for the board to submit all the plans still under consideration—Plans I and II, and three different elementary school plans—to the court without any recommendation. "We were specifically instructed by the judge to come up with a plan," Mrs. Coe said. The resolution was defeated six to three—the three being Small, Ingram and Mrs. Watkins. Then Mrs. Coe moved for adoption of Plan II. "I knew it didn't have majority support," she said later, "and I voted against it myself. I just wanted to get it out of the way so we could adopt Plan I." The vote on Plan II showed Lane and Mrs. Sonnenburg for, Mrs. Coe and the three blacks against, and the other three abstaining.

Then Mrs. Coe moved for adoption of Plan I. But Mrs. Sonnenburg voted with Small, Ingram and Mrs. Watkins against it, and Lane, whose vote would have broken a four-four tie, abstained.

A recess was called, and when the board came back to try to break the tie, Small reintroduced his resolution calling for all plans to be submitted to the court, and he added an amendment; that the judge be told that Plan II and an elementary plan Mrs. Sonnenburg had devised were "the least disruptive and the least expensive." The motion passed by five to four, with Lane breaking the tie and the three black members and Mrs. Coe in the minority. The next day, the entire package of plans and the Small resolution were presented to the court. The Legal Defense Fund will be given time to answer the board's presentation, and hearings will be scheduled by Judge McRae, after which he will issue his ruling. And in September, some degree of further desegregation will proceed.

"... encouraging progress out of its segregated past"

In all of the intricate and convoluted maneuverings that have gone on in public and behind the scenes in Memphis since last April, there has been enough emotion to elate and depress and exhaust everybody. That no overt physical violence has occurred in that stormy period can only be seen as a hopeful indication that this city, however divided it is, had had its fill of violence. At this point in its history, Memphis undoubtedly has more visible and influential citizens, black and white, who are openly committed to community-wide equity than it has ever had before. In many measurable and specific ways, it has made encouraging progress out of its segregated past.

But the legacy of that past still lingers, and it too is measurable and specific. It can be seen in the actions, if not the words, of many thousands of whites who long for the past to reappear. It can be seen in the conditions that thousands of blacks still live under—the poverty of mind and body, the anger and anguish of rejection, the paucity of marketable skills. It can be seen in the failure of institutions—economic, political, educational, religious institutions—to eliminate from their bodies the cancer of white supremacy.

It is hard to be sanguine about the prospects for stability and equity in the public schools. The masses of black citizens apparently are still committed to those goals, in spite of years of frustration and disappointment. But the masses of whites are not, and those who could contribute so much to the realization of the goals—the middle and upper classes—are the very ones who have fled from responsibility first, leaving their fellow whites who have less economic independence to work out the complexities of desegregation as best they can. On March 5, public school attendance records showed a total enrollment of 130,551—including 79,744 blacks (61.1 per cent) and 50,807 whites (38.9 per cent). On Feb. 5, 130,411 students were on the rolls (78,999 blacks, 51,412 whites) and on Jan. 5, the total was 137,795 (80,249 blacks, 57,546 whites). Thus, there are 500 fewer blacks and about 6,700 fewer whites in the schools now than there were before busing began. And since the fall of 1970, when the Memphis schools reached an enrollment peak of more than 148,000, white enrollment has declined from about 72,000 to the present 50,807.

Where have those white students gone? Late in March, the CAB schools reported to public school officials (as required by state law) that they had 4,298 students enrolled in 26 schools in Memphis and one other school in outlying Shelby County. A week later, Ken Keele said CAB had 27 schools, 25 principals, 192 teachers and 5,139 students—not counting absentees on the day the census was taken. Clearly, the CAB schools are not the only refuge. The white poor—those who cannot afford even the CAB schools—either stay in the public schools or drop out altogether. The more affluent have other private schools in Memphis to choose from, if they can get in

them, or they can move into Shelby County, or another county, or another city, or send their children away to school. They have freedom of choice—and Memphis, because of them, has a 60 per cent black public school system.

Regardless of whether Memphis implements Plan I or Plan II or some other plan of school desegregation, it has already lost many thousands of white students, and in all probability it will lose more. The school system is powerless to control that exodus. It must take the children who cannot or will not flee and do everything possible to educate them, and it will take a heroic effort by all concerned to do the job well. If it fails, Memphis will be forced to confront a crisis of stupefying proportions; New York, Philadelphia, Detroit and St. Louis, cities where many thousands of whites have long since fled the schools, offer examples to ponder. If, on the other hand, Memphis manages somehow to bring quality and equity and stability into its beleagured school system, no matter what its racial composition turns out to be, it will be among a very small number of American cities that have decided they can no longer afford segregated schools.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

December 10, 1971.
The Memphis school desegregation decision is handed down by federal Judge Robert McRae.

March 28, 1972.
Hearings are held on Plans A & B.

April 5, 1972.
The Memphis Chamber of Commerce goes on record in support of public school education.

April 25 - 26, 1972.
Citizens Against Busing stage a two day boycott.

June 5, 1972.
The court grants a stay order for Plan A.

August 29, 1972.
The court's stay order is lifted.

September 27, 1972.
The court orders Plan A implemented on January 22, 1973.

October 17, 1972.
The chamber sponsored group, IMPACT, is formed.

November 6, 1972.
Agreement between Board of Education and Chamber of Commerce is signed.

November 10, 1972.
IMPACT's advertising program begins.

November - December, 1972.
Public relations proposal is prepared.

December 6, 1972.
Representatives from the Southern Regional Council meet with the Board of Education and Chamber of Commerce officials.

January 2, 1972.
Thirty business leaders are taped for television with statement in support of public education.

January 14, 1973.
Thirty-three business leaders issue statement supporting public education.

January 16, 1973.
Police chief and Chamber of Commerce officials meet.

January 18, 1973.
Black leaders, Chamber of Commerce officials and police chief meet.

January 24, 1973.
Buses roll.